

Strategies for Talking about NCLB and AYP

Framing the NCLB issue

- Washington state educators fully support the goals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and have already begun to implement the major provisions of the new federal law. In fact, Washington's accountability plan was approved this past May with no qualifying conditions. Washington has a plan; now that plan needs to be more broadly communicated to students, educators, parents, the media, and the public.
- We will also continue to support Washington state's tradition of high academic standards and continuous school improvement while implementing NCLB because we believe that **all** children can learn. Having high expectations for our students is not new in Washington. However, the way in which school improvement is measured is different under this new law.
- Since the passage of Washington's education reform legislation in 1993, Washington has paid particular attention to improving elementary schools and this work has paid off; more elementary school students from all walks of life are proving they can meet higher standards.
- We must now give that same attention and support to our middle and high schools. These students will be the first affected by the state's new graduation requirements and the new federal law.
- We anticipate that, as schools, districts, and states across the country begin to implement this new law, some adjustments will be made, including provisions related to our special needs students and English Language Learners (ELL).
- In the end, we must remember the goal of the new law is not about compliance. It is about student achievement.

Sample Key Messages for the Release of AYP Data

- Washington state is a national model for setting and measuring high achievement standards for its students.
- Our schools and districts are addressing the new NCLB requirements while we continue – in the midst of budget cuts – to do what's best for students.
- We can't do this alone. Maintaining high quality schools is a job for the entire community. We need your help in getting all children to these goals.
- We WANT parent and community input. Please contact your building principal or district office to get involved.

Communication Strategies for AYP Release

- Take control of your communication early.
- In trying to refute questions from the media about "failing schools" **do not** reiterate—thereby reinforcing—these negative messages. Schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress for one year "did not make AYP." Schools that do not make AYP **for two consecutive** years are in "school improvement."
- Identify your target audiences (including staff, parents, community opinion leaders and the media).
- Communicate with these groups often.
- Be proactive – tell your story first.
 - What is your district's plan for assisting schools not making AYP?
 - Here are the challenges/opportunities we face.
 - This is where we're going and we need community support to get there.
- Inform all school employees, unions, PTSA, boosters and other members of the school family so they can also carry this message.
- Remind school employees they are public relations ambassadors for the schools. What they say will affect the public's impression of your school.
- Use your district's communication vehicles to reach audiences, including: newsletters, teacher conferences, memos, notes, lunch menus, open houses, school productions, Web sites, athletic events and cable TV.
- Always include a contact number or e-mail address where people can get more information.